CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN ACTION: EXPLORING ENGAGEMENT ON POLICY FORMULATION IN TUGUEGARAO CITY

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ABSTRACT

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Philippines are encouraged to participate in local governance, as outlined in existing statutes and policies, to promote effective and efficient local development. However, the extent and effectiveness of their involvement remain areas that warrant further study. This explained the need to examine the level of CSO engagement in policy formulation in the Philippines. This study was conducted to determine the existing engagement of CSOs in policy formulation processes, highlight their contributions to policy development, identify any challenges to their full participation, and provide a framework for effective collaboration between CSOs and LGUs in the creation of policies. By employing a multiple mixed-methods design, the study successfully achieved its objectives through the use of a survey questionnaire that assessed the level of engagement of CSOs in policy formulation, and a semi-structured interview questionnaire to explore their contributions and challenges in policy formulation in Tuguegarao City. Moreover, the study involved 15 accredited CSOs operating in Tuguegarao City who willingly participated in data gathering. Descriptive, quantitative, and thematic analyses were used for the data analysis. The results revealed that the level of engagement of CSOs in the policy formulation processes in Tuguegarao City remains low, which is often limited to consultations and approvals without necessarily co-creating and managing policies directly. In addition, it was also found that CSOs face persistent challenges, including a lack of institutional support, insufficient communication with local government unit (LGU) officials, prioritization of other sectors, and financial constraints. For an effective collaboration between CSOs and LGUs, an ELEVATE framework is proposed, a step-by-step model created to promote responsive, inclusive, and influential policymaking in Tuguegarao City. The recommendation focuses on adopting the ELEVATE framework to strengthen CSO engagement and give them a stronger role in policymaking while encouraging a broader scope to allow for comparisons of CSOs' levels of participation in different localities.

Keywords: *Civil Society Organizations, Policy Formulation, Local Government Units, Engagement Levels, Local Governance, Challenges, Contributions.*

INTRODUCTION

Civil society refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities. Memorandum Circular No. 2018-89, dated July 11, 2018, states that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) refer to a non-state and non-profit association that works to improve society and the human condition. Basic types of CSOs include non-governmental organizations, civic organizations, cooperatives, social movements, professional groups, and business groups. A civil society organization is an organizational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process and act as a mediator between public authority and citizens

(Civil Society Organization - EUR-Lex, n.d.). Successful democracies in one way or another depend on how well civil society organizations are constituted (Waddell, 2017). Civil society has evolved from voluntary associations and organizations in the eighteenth century to include a diverse range of institutions, fostering democratic political culture and civic virtues (Van Dijck et al., 2017). CSOs help to put the needs of citizens and communities on the agenda of policymaking (Mavee, 2022). CSOs are potent agents of development.

In the Philippines, the participation of CSOs in local governance is encouraged under existing statutes and policies to bring about effective and efficient local development; and to foster an enabling environment where citizens and government officials can work together in identifying urgent problems and in crafting plans that will address them (Ursulum et al., 2024). Parekh and Klintman (2021) concluded in their study that there is a need for CSOs to increase integration and coordination in the practice of their activities. Javier and Javier (2018) cited that local government units (LGUs) in the Philippines are confronted with many issues and concerns. Hence, civil society participation is a good thing to be widely accepted, as a report tells that the effective engagement of civil society results in more informed decision making by government (Aspinwall, 2021).

CSOs are key actors in promoting democratic governance, especially at the local level, where they advocate for inclusive, transparent, and accountable policymaking (Pasamonte, 2024). While CSOs have long been involved in decision-making processes, there is a significant gap in research regarding their engagement in policy formulation, the stage where policies are initially proposed and shaped. This gap is particularly evident in the Philippines, where, despite legal frameworks such as the Local Government Code of 1991 and Guidelines on Engagements with Civil Society Organization (DILG MC No. 2018-89), encouraging CSO participation, their actual influence in policy formulation remains limited due to barriers like political resistance, institutional constraints, and capacity limitations (Ursulum, et al., 2024). Existing studies have focused on decision-making, leaving the complexities of CSO involvement in policy formulation under-explored (Gòmez, 2018). This research sought to assess the level of CSO engagement in the policy formulation process and identify the specific challenges that hinder their full participation, ultimately enhancing the inclusiveness and transparency of policymaking in the Philippines.

CSOs in the Philippines play a vital role in promoting good governance and representing the interests of marginalized groups (Yasay, 2018). An example of this is the *Lakas ng Kababaihan Ng Naga*, founded by Leni Robredo, which functioned to address the issue of economic empowerment for women. They established livelihood programs for the women. The organization also started a new program called Partnership Against Poverty and Hunger. Additionally, Quezon City created the People's Council of Quezon City (PCQC) to

institutionalize people's participation in local governance, which represents more than 4,200 accredited CSOs in the city. The 50 representatives from different sectors can sit in QC local special bodies, where they are the task forces and committees that can participate in the deliberations, conceptualization, and evaluation of projects (Civil Society Organizations and Good Governance | Philippine News Agency, n.d.). The DILG-NCR's regional rollout on strengthening CSO Desk Officers emphasized the role of CSOs in governance and policymaking, particularly in participatory governance and local development. This aligns with the goals of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Program, which has also worked to strengthen CSO involvement in policy formulation. Through the Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities (ADM) program, 83% of Municipal Development Councils (MDCs) included CSOs in sectoral committees, and 89% held regular meetings to ensure continuous CSO engagement. The OGP program's focus on functional participation in municipal, provincial, and barangay development councils mirrors the efforts discussed at the DILG-NCR event, demonstrating a shared commitment to empowering CSOs in formulating policies that respond to community needs. Both initiatives, through capacity-building and active participation, work towards more inclusive and effective governance.

This proves that CSOs play an active role in engaging with the local government and empowering communities to take an active part in their development (Turok & Scheba, 2020). CSOs act as intermediaries between citizens and the government (Alidemaj and Haxhiu, 2021), indicating that policy changes occur not only top-down but also bottom-up through community and civic organizing. The study explores the perceptions and experiences of CSO leaders on their participation in policy development and implementation at the local government level (Abdula & Bagolong, 2021). A wide range of tasks essential to democratic functioning are carried out by CSOs, including policy research, policy advocacy, government performance monitoring, social capital creation, and citizen empowerment (Momen et al., 2020). By taking on these diverse responsibilities, CSOs establish themselves as crucial players in the governance system, acting as national and local watchdogs and promoters of democratic transformation (Abdula & Bagolong, 2021).

In partnership with DILG Region 02, the Zonta Club of Central Tuguegarao conducted online training for the Capacity Development Program for CSOs in Local Development Councils (Zonta Club of Central Tuguegarao Empowers Civil Society Organizations, n.d.). Various CSOs and stakeholders monitored completed Programs, Projects, and Activities (PPAs) in Tuguegarao City to ensure transparency and accountability through the DILG's Full Disclosure Policy. CSOs were empowered to evaluate government documents, promoting responsible governance.

The engagement of CSOs in the policy formulation process in the Philippines has gained significant recognition in recent years, with their participation being considered crucial for promoting principles of good governance (Gabriel, 2017). However, the extent and effectiveness of their involvement remain areas that warrant further investigation (Yasay, 2018). This explained the need to examine the level of CSO engagement in policy formulation in the Philippines, as it could provide valuable insights into the state of civil society participation and its impact on the policymaking process. The researchers intended to frame the study in the context of studying the level of engagement of CSOs in the policymaking process in the local government of Tuguegarao City. Thus, the researchers utilized a multiple mixed-method approach that combined quantitative data collection through surveys of CSO representatives to gather information on the level of CSO engagement, as well as qualitative data analysis of semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and challenges surrounding CSO engagement.

Research Objectives

This research was conducted to determine the existing engagement of Civil Society Organizations in policy formulation processes, highlight their contributions to policy development, identify challenges to their full participation, and provide a framework for effective collaboration between CSOs and LGUs in the creation of policies.

Significance of the Study

This study examines the relationship between Civil Society Organizations and local governance in Tuguegarao City. Its findings will be highly valuable to various sectors, including local government units and policymakers, civil society groups, scholars in political science and law, as well as future researchers. By examining the complexities of policy formulation processes and CSO involvement, this study will address critical gaps in the understanding of participatory governance at the local level. First, the study will be significant for local government units and policymakers as it will highlight the current level of CSO involvement in policymaking, which will be important for understanding the effectiveness of existing engagement strategies. This study aims to assist local government units in identifying shortcomings in their governance practices by pinpointing areas with limited CSOs' involvement. By analyzing the barriers that restrict CSO participation, policymakers can develop more inclusive and participatory governance strategies. Second, this study will be beneficial to civil society organizations by helping them understand the challenges they may face, which will lead to the development of more effective participation strategies. The findings of this study will support the development of practical, evidence-based approaches to boost their influence in policymaking. It will also advance academic discussions in political science and legal studies by shedding light on participatory democracy, the nature of political representation, and the evolving

relationships between state institutions and non-state organizations, aiming to illustrate the complex partnership between civil society organizations and local administrations within democratic practices. Lastly, this research will be important for future studies as a valuable resource for identifying important gaps and offering guidance for examining civil society engagement in policy formulation.

Conceptual Framework

This study was anchored in the Engagement Pyramid of Gideon Rosenblatt (2010). The Engagement Pyramid was used to divide supporters into segments based on their level of engagement. Leaders could use this structure to plan the range of engagement strategies and tactics at their disposal. While the original Engagement Pyramid by Gideon Rosenblatt described engagement from the viewpoint of the company or target entity, the study's adaptation of the model looked at the engagement activities between the civil society organization and the local government unit on policy formulation. It extended the idea of creating public awareness to creating opportunities for public engagement. The pyramid levels ranged from lower levels to moderate- to high-level engagement activities.

This framework guided the researchers in understanding the different levels of CSOs' participation in policymaking. The six levels of engagement involve: a) **observing**, where one is interested in the cause and aware of the policies. This forms the base level of engagement, where CSOs become interested in and aware of policies and ordinances-related matters; b) **following**, where one understands the cause, cares about the policies, and is prepared to increase their involvement; c) **endorsing**, a single-step action with low risk/investment. It involves actions such as signing a petition and endorsing programs or campaigns; d) **contributing**, a multi-step action representing the significant contribution of time, money, or social capital. It involves deep commitment, such as making large donations, joining committee, attending events, and coordinating in reviewing such policies; e) **owning**, when stakeholders take full responsibility for the policy or project, including its design, implementation, and ongoing management, while receiving some level of support or resources from external parties, but maintaining control over the overall process; and f) **leading**, which represents a stage in which stakeholders have complete authority and leadership over the entire policy or project, making all critical decisions, directing the actions, and driving the process forward with little to no external influence or input, ensuring that the initiative is a fully managed and guided by those at the forefront.

This approach was successful in developing strategies to help CSOs climb from low engagement to the top of the pyramid. Moreover, it facilitated an understanding of the engagement dynamics and advanced the cause for determining the levels of CSO involvement that could be reached in local

governance, which will eventually result in a more inclusive and participatory government structure.

Literature Review

CSOs in the Philippines

In the Philippines, CSOs are referred to as a non-stock, non-profit domestic corporation duly registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission or a cooperative duly registered with the Cooperative Development Authority, committed to the task of socioeconomic development and established primarily for providing goods and services to the public (World Bank, n.d). CSOs often serve as an alternative to government in terms of service provision that the latter fails to deliver sufficiently or effectively; claim-making thus becomes a matter of alternative model-building, and CSOs also serve as self-help organizations where members engage in mutual aid regardless of the absence or presence of assistance from the government or the private sector (Tuaño, 2011).

Historically, CSOs in the Philippines have played an important role in politics, including influencing the removal of presidents accused of corruption, authoritarianism, or abuse of power (Arugay & Baquisal, 2023). It has demonstrated the capacity to mobilize large-scale actions outside traditional constitutional processes when necessary to address governance concerns. Civil society emerged as a major force in the Philippines in the 1970s and 1980s, especially during the historic "people power" demonstrations that overthrew President Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. in 1986 (Asian Development Bank, 2023). A new constitution was introduced under President Corazon Aquino, which established the government's obligation to assist CSO growth and upheld the people's right to participate in the nation's social, economic, and political life. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo expanded the National Anti-Poverty Commission, which was first established in 1998 by President Joseph Ejercito Estrada. To further the government's anti-poverty efforts, the commission collaborated closely with CSOs. CSOs were well established in the country's governance by the time President Benigno Aquino III took office in 2010. Between 2010 and 2016, their engagement in social, economic, and political issues peaked, and they contributed to causes like education, reproductive health, and anti-corruption efforts (Asian Bank Development, 2023).

However, the Duterte administration was the first to significantly restrict civic space following martial law, rather than merely targeting its detractors—it was a significant period for civil society in the Philippines. Stricter security measures, including CSOs, were implemented as a result of Duterte's focus on terrorism. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued a rule in November 2018 that gives it the authority to determine which CSOs may be involved in money laundering or terrorism. The SEC had a great deal of control because this was

based on reports from organizations like the Philippine National Police (CIVICUS, 2019). It was more difficult for civil society to operate as a result of the severe measures and derogatory remarks directed at its leaders, as well as the enactment of legislation restricting their operations. As a result, many CSOs in the Philippines made the decision to abstain from political activism and steer clear of delicate subjects that could attract the attention of the security forces or the government (Arugay & Baquisal, 2023). The Philippines' civil society faced numerous difficulties under Duterte's leadership. The sector's sustainability declined between 2016 and 2020, per the Caucus of Development NGO Networks, Inc. (CODE-NGO) study of the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI).

Civil Society Organizations

Civil society refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities. Memorandum Circular No. 2018-89, dated July 11, 2018, states that CSOs refer to a non-state and non-profit association that works to improve society and the human condition. Basic types of CSOs include non-governmental organizations, civic organizations, cooperatives, social movements, professional groups, and business groups. A civil society organization is an organizational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process, and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens (Civil Society Organization - EUR-Lex, n.d.). According to Vllasaj et al. (2022), civil society organization is a term used for any group outside the private business sector and government institutions. According to international standards, non-profitability and institutional separation from the government are the primary characteristics of a civil society organization (Pozniakovska, 2024). They operate in communities with the purpose of influencing the behavior of society in a manner distinct from both government and business organizations (Ongeta, 2020). Furthermore, nongovernmental organizations are used to distinguish themselves from government institutions, but non-profit organizations are distinguished by the fact that their activity is not primarily aimed at profit, separating them from the commercial sector.

According to the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG, 2022), the CSO is a critical partner that can play various roles and a wide range of functions in the implementation of the programs and activities. As such, in the engagement with civil society, appropriate programming arrangements and support mechanisms shall be put in place to ensure the achievement of the desired development results. The relationship between effective governance and civil society participation is so fundamental that scholars assert the institutionalization of good governance is impossible without an active civil society (Islam & Ehsan, 2019). This bold statement reflects a growing recognition of the essential role that CSOs play in democratic governance. These

organizations engage in a diverse array of activities crucial to democratic functioning, including conducting policy research, maintaining policy advocacy, monitoring government performance, building social capital, and empowering citizens (Momen et al., 2020).

According to Ateng and Ibrahim (2023), peace education initiatives run by civil society organizations raise awareness, promote understanding between people, and instill ideals of human rights, non-violence, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and trust-building. One type of civil governance identified by Williams et al. (2017) is the 'advocacy-based' approach, which outlines initiatives taken by CSOs, who are frequently public interest legal organizations, to make sure that businesses abide by and improve the enforcement of current labor laws. Through these multifaceted roles, CSOs position themselves as essential actors in the governance landscape, serving as watchdogs and advocates for democratic reform at both local and national levels. In order to promote social and political change, CSOs in Indonesia use a variety of advocacy techniques, such as lobbying, public campaigns, grassroots mobilization, and coalition-building (Rusfiana and Kurniasih, 2024). Moreover, the "Civil Society Affairs Office" in Cagayan de Oro was established by the city mayor to assist, handle, and attend to CSO issues and concerns. This indicates that CSO participation in community politics has improved relations with LGU (Yasay, D., 2018).

Role of CSOs in Policy Formulation

CSOs are intermediaries, linking citizens with policymakers and acting as channels through which the preferences and concerns of the public are communicated to those in power (Albareda, 2018). Activities of CSOs are done through the invitation of meetings, conferences, and sessions. The engagement of CSOs in local governance is limited only to what is provided in the Philippine Legal provisions. Most of this engagement dwells on the accreditation and selection of CSOs in local special bodies (LSB), committees, and councils (Pasamonte, 2024). To effectively serve as intermediaries between citizens and policymakers, CSOs need certain organizational qualities that enable them to communicate effectively with both their members and the decision-makers. These attributes help CSOs relay the concerns of their constituents to policymakers and ensure that they can represent interests in the policy process (Daugbjerg, 2018). By carrying out this role, CSOs can help fill gaps within public institutions and contribute to the overall health of democracy. In doing so, they support the legitimacy and enhance the quality of governance systems, reflecting that decisions are more responsive to the needs of society (Albareda, 2018).

The capacity of CSOs to influence policy is heavily shaped by the regulatory landscape and their relationships with government institutions. In diverse contexts such as South Africa and Ethiopia, Dina Lupin (2022) has observed that civil society regulations can either enable or limit CSO activities. These

regulatory frameworks are critical in determining the extent of CSO operations, influencing their funding mechanisms, their interactions with government bodies, and affecting their ability to advocate effectively. While it is essential to acknowledge the role of CSOs in promoting transparent and participatory governance is important, this recognition must be accompanied by specific measures that allow these organizations to operate effectively without excessive interference. Such measures should include well-defined regulatory frameworks, protected areas for CSO advocacy, mechanisms for genuine participation in policy discussions, and safeguards against excessive governmental control.

To thoroughly understand the impact of CSOs on policy outcomes, it is important to explore how their participation can improve legitimacy and representation in governance structures. Recent studies have provided valuable insights into this relationship. Yue (2024) indicates that CSOs are champions in advocating for marginalized groups, particularly in health policy debates. This advocacy function serves multiple purposes, including giving a platform for voices that might otherwise go unheard, introducing diverse perspectives into policy discussions and debates, ensuring more inclusive representative policy outcomes, and strengthening the democratic nature of policy formulation.

CSOs frequently participate in consensus-based planning during the decision-making process of a district legislature, showing their involvement in development planning and efforts. CSOs participate in planning based on community members by ensuring that their concerns, needs, and aspirations are heard and considered. Moreover, Mavee (2022) states that CSOs assist in bringing communities' and citizens' demands to the attention of policymakers, helping bridge the gap between grassroots concerns and government decision-making. CSOs ensure that development plans address the needs of all community members, including women, youth, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable populations. In other cases, CSOs work closely with government agencies on initiatives or projects, either throughout the entire project or at a specific phase of the activities, such as planning, implementation, or evaluation (Hendricks, 2023). Although their involvement in formulating policies and ordinances is limited, their contribution to development planning is highly relevant and effective (Cahimtong & Tenorio, 2024, p. 51).

According to Pasamonte (2024), CSOs are invited to attend meetings and conferences and can share their thoughts and opinions on a specific agenda. However, there was limited evidence showing that those were acknowledged and incorporated into the committee's final decisions. CSOs' attendance in meetings is part of the legal mandates, particularly of some committees that can only have a quorum with the presence of CSOs, in the case of the Local Development Council. There should be at least one CSO signifying their membership in some LSB, committees, and councils. The engagement of CSOs has been moderate, which suggests that such engagement has been lukewarm. CSOs and LGU

partnership thus undermines the core concepts of collaborative governance. The concept thrives on active engagement from diverse stakeholders, including CSOs (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

Challenges of CSOs in the Philippines

CSOs in the Philippines engage in a wide range of activities, from education and community development to advocacy and sustainable development (Yasay, 2018). However, these organizations face a myriad of challenges that hinder their ability to effectively serve their communities and influence policy.

Among the many challenges faced by CSOs in implementing their programs and projects are the lack of funding and human resources, the lack of government support, and political patronage. CSOs struggle for financial survival. They are dependent on external funding and are affected by a lack of staff for the successor generation and weak internal governance. Philippine CSOs secure their funding through membership dues, donations, subsidies, and revenue from income-generating activities (Yasay, 2018). There have been moves to promote social enterprises as a response to this. This has value, but it has its limits for CSOs focusing on advocacy and on delivering services to the very poor (Caucus of Development NGO Networks [CODE-NGO], 2022). While it is true that many CSOs operate based on volunteerism, the more stable and capable CSOs rely on paid full-time staff to deliver their programs and services. In fact, the ability of many CSOs to keep their staff has been affected by the lack of funds (ADB, 2013). CSOs also struggle to sustain and strengthen active and independent participation in governance (CODE-NGO,2022).

There is still a need to conduct research on the level of engagement of civil society organizations in policy-making to explore the barriers hindering their participation in local governance. While there is extensive literature on CSO participation, existing studies are often either broad analyses or focused case studies, and they have not yet provided a comprehensive view of CSO involvement across all stages of the policy-making process. Moreover, in the Philippines, there are still very few studies that focus specifically on CSO engagement in policy-making. Most of the available research, both locally and internationally, looks more at decision-making, leaving a gap in understanding their role in shaping policies directly. Since policy-making and decision-making are different in terms of influence, it is important to study them separately. This gap highlights the need for more comparative research to assess different local government settings, considering factors such as political will, CSO capacities, and regulatory environments that impact CSO effectiveness in policy processes.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a multiple mixed-methods research design. By employing a descriptive methodology to assess CSOs' participation in local policymaking, the quantitative phase generated numerical data on participation levels. Even though these studies found significant trends, they were unable to adequately explain the challenges CSOs face and the factors that influence their level of engagement.

To provide deeper insights, the qualitative phase used basic topic analysis to identify recurring themes, perspectives, and experiences related to the contributions and challenges encountered by CSOs during their participation. This approach ensured that while the qualitative phase uncovered fundamental problems, the quantitative data emphasized general patterns, leading to more comprehensive conclusions and useful recommendations.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, Philippines.

Respondents of the Study

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) served as the respondents for this study, which aimed to assess their current engagement in local government policy formulation processes. The researchers utilized non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, to select respondents in Tuguegarao City.

The researchers interviewed the respondents to gain insights into the extent of CSO participation in policy formulation, highlight their contributions, and identify the challenges they face in this process. The researchers selected the respondents based on the following criteria:

a) The CSO must be officially registered with the appropriate government agency.
b) The CSO must be based and primarily operate within Tuguegarao City, Cagayan.

c) The CSO must belong to one of these sectors: women, agricultural or industrial workers, marginalized groups such as the urban poor, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, youth, cooperatives, and transportation groups.
d) The CSO representative must hold a leadership position within the organization.
e) The CSO must express willingness to participate in the study and share their policy engagement experiences.

Research Instrument

A survey questionnaire served as the primary instrument for this study's quantitative data collection on the degree of CSO involvement in policymaking processes. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to gather qualitative information and allow for a more in-depth analysis of their contributions and challenges that CSOs face when developing policy. This process presented a more complete knowledge of the depth and drive of their involvement. To guarantee alignment with the theoretical framework of the study, a self-developed questionnaire was applied using Gideon Rosenblatt's six levels of the Engagement Pyramid as the basis for all questions. The guide probes three main themes: (1) the sector or area of interest of the CSOs they represent; (2) the contributions their organization makes to policymaking; and (3) the challenges that CSOs experience in their participation.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers of this study first requested the endorsement of the Center for Social Innovation and Education Research. After that, the researchers sought approval from the University Research and Innovation Office and the Ethical Board through a formal letter before conducting data gathering. Upon approval, the researchers asked for a complete list of registered CSOs in Tuguegarao City from the Local Government Unit Office of Tuguegarao City. The respondents were contacted through the CSO Desk Officer of the LGU, followed by a formal letter. The data gathering began in April 2025. Before starting the preliminary survey, the researchers secured informed consent from the participants. This study utilized a multiple mixed-methods design, where survey questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. After the survey data had been collected, the researchers immediately conducted a face-to-face interview with the respondents. Researchers also sought their permission to record and document the interviews to ensure that the responses of participants are accurately captured and documented.

Data Analysis

Following Gideon Roosenblatt's Engagement Pyramid, the data collected from the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the degree of CSO participation in the local government level policy formulation process.

Ordinal data using a Likert scale was utilized in the survey to measure the level of engagement of CSOs based on the stages identified in the Engagement Pyramid. Each engagement level was represented by a set of statements rated on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

The frequency was used to count the number of CSOs at each engagement level in the policy formulation process, as well as to express the proportion of CSOs at each level relative to the total number of respondents.

Using thematic analysis of the qualitative data, difficulties and the contributions made by civil society organizations (CSOs) in the policy-making process were highlighted. Clearly defining a procedure for spotting and evaluating trends in qualitative data is absolutely essential. Braun and Clarke (2006) underlined the need for a methodical approach for thematic research. For this research, thematic analysis was done in the following phases:

1. **Familiarization and Coding**: Transcripts or data will be reviewed. During this step, read the transcripts carefully and take notes on key points. Coding involves assigning meaningful labels to relevant dataset parts based on research objectives.

2. **Theme Development:** Codes will be merged, grouped, or compressed to form significant patterns and produce a potential topic.

3. **Examining and Defining Themes:** Potential themes will be examined to make sure they fit the research question, dataset, and coded data. Once the topics have been reviewed, we define them by developing analytical narratives that show the data that has been retrieved. After a topic is chosen, it will be supported by summaries and quotes that have been transcribed to give readers a straightforward interpretation.

4. **Creating the Report:** The data that has been studied will be used to create an academic report.

Ethical Considerations

The approach of this study strictly complied with ethical standards. Before the data collection process started, the researchers asked the Civil Society Organizations in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, for the necessary permission. Before they were used, the research adviser checked all the papers, questions, and manuscripts to guarantee the sensitivity and validity of the materials. The researchers strictly upheld the confidentiality of acquired data, which is restricted solely to this research study. Respondents were comprehensively informed about the research, affirming their right to withdraw or willingly participate in the data collection process. The researchers maintained the anonymity of the respondents, and only the necessary data were gathered and assessed from the respondents. Furthermore, the University Research Development Center of the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao conducted a technical review of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 illustrates the profile of the respondents who were categorized based on their sectoral affiliations. The respondents came from seven marginalized sectors: cooperative, women, transport, persons with disabilities (PWD), senior citizens, youth, and vendors.

***Table 1**. Profile of Respondents*

Sectors	Number of Respondents
Cooperative	6
Women	2
Transport	2
PWD	1
Senior Citizens	1
Youth	1
Vendor	2

Based on the table, the cooperative sector has the largest representation at the table with six representatives from different organizations. This suggests that cooperatives are more orderly and dynamic businesses, probably due to their mandated sectoral-based structures and formal economic goals. Their access to institutional and financial resources, as well as their registration with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), enhances their ability to continue participating in governance processes. The sector's organizational maturity may also contribute to the explanation of its frequent participation in LGU consultations and policy discussions.

At the same time, the inclusion of youths, PWDs, and seniors with one representative each marks a meaningful milestone toward inclusive participation. While these representatives are fewer in number, they reflect a deepening diversity of local governance representation. In particular, young people’s

involvement signals an expansion of engagement through CSOs, which provide a formal channel beyond politics for youth to articulate their concerns on education, employment, and digital inclusion. Likewise, the representation of persons with disabilities (PWD) and senior citizens highlights increasing institutional recognition of responsive programming aligned with differentiated sectoral needs. This demonstrates the range of CSOs working with women, the youth, PWDs, elderly citizens, business, and even transportation, enabling them to form associations and engage with the government.

The variety and presence of these CSOs show how increasingly accessible civic space in Tuguegarao is, even to unofficial and historically underprivileged groups. It is crucial to note that these participants were chosen by invitation, even though the table obviously shows a considerable number of cooperative sectors. The CSO scene of Tuguegarao City is thus not entirely reflected in the table. The total number of respondents just represents those who were accessible and ready to take part during the data collection process. Still, the way respondents divide sectors provides information about who remains underrepresented and who now has access to venues for making decisions.

***Table 2**. Engagement Levels*

Level of Engagement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Observing (Policy Awareness)	0	0	16	29
Following (Policy Monitoring)	0	1	23	21
Endorsing (Policy Support and Endorsement)	2	4	22	17
Contributing (Policy Recommendations)	19	21	3	2
Owning (Policy Management)	34	8	1	2
Leading (Policy Initiative)	30	12	3	0

Table 2 demonstrates the level of engagement 15 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have with Tuguegarao City policymaking. Gideon Rosenblatt's Engagement Pyramid—Observing and Following (Low Engagement), Endorsing and Contributing (Moderate Engagement), and Owning and Leading (High Engagement) directs the categorization of each responder responding three questions per level.

Results in Table 2 show that most CSOs remain at a low engagement level, which is Observing and Following. In Observing, 29 strongly agreed and 16 agreed, which means that CSOs are aware of local ordinances and are interested in them. Moreover, in the Following, 21 strongly agreed, and 23 agreed, with only one respondent disagreeing, which shows that most of the respondents understand policies and receive updates. However, these findings show that there is no active involvement and influence regarding the policies and ordinances in the locality.

The data also shows that fewer CSOs have a moderate engagement level, such as Endorsing and Contributing. In Endorsing, 17 strongly agreed, and 22 agreed, which means that they support ordinances through public statements and signing petitions. However, two strongly disagreed, and four disagreed, which suggests that they endorse policies just to show a passive way of support rather than actively shaping such policies. Furthermore, in Contributing, 19 strongly disagreed, and 21 disagreed that they contributed to writing recommendations and facilitating consultations. Only two agreed, and three strongly agreed, which underscores that CSOs have a limited influence on actual policy formulation.

Furthermore, it portrays that CSOs' participation at the highest engagement levels, such as Owning and Leading, has significantly declined. 34 strongly disagreed in owning their policy management, resource allocation, or generation of ideas. Only one strongly agreed, and two agreed; hence, CSOs hardly feel responsibility for policy decisions. In Leading, 30 strongly disagreed and 12 disagreed that they lead in policy making. Emphasizing that CSOs hardly ever assume leadership roles in policy formulation, only three agreed and none strongly agreed.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SECTORAL REPRESENTATION

CSOs represent different sectors and ensure the local government hears the voices of underprivileged and vulnerable groups. Their ideas help LGU decide which services and initiatives call for improvement. The participation of these CSOs presents a unique perspective on issues related to the needs of their respective industries.

A. CSO Work in the Community

Based on the responses, CSOs are really active in their own ways, depending on the sector they belong to. They directly assist their members and design initiatives. The respondents from the PWD sector go to consultations to address financing and health issues and carry out awareness initiatives. In the

cooperative sector, they provide groceries and help their members with rental and cleaning duties.

In the women's sector, they organize activities focused on women's empowerment and help with clean-up campaigns. In the transportation sector, they track concerns including terminal problems and outdated ordinances. Senior citizens evaluate the requirements of their members and ensure that their issues get to the LGU. Young groups design and coordinate their own activities, including contests meant to enable young people to grow and flourish. While the vendors take initiative by conducting clean-up drives and bloodletting activities using their own money.

By their own actions in the community, these CSO activities and programs demonstrate a great dedication to public welfare and community development as well as their significant influence (Mundy, 2008). Working directly with communities, they are already aware of which initiatives are successful, where resources are missing, and how programs may be made more inclusive and responsive.

Often in areas where government services are insufficient or nonexistent, CSOs independently begin initiatives to meet the socioeconomic needs of their communities, therefore contributing significantly to local development. Men et al. (2020) claim that CSOs' civic responsibility stems from their capacity to react to local situations, therefore attesting to their legitimacy and social credibility. Particularly in cases where local governments are unable to offer services, CSOs serve as substitute service providers (Tuaño, 2011). But challenges such as unequal LGU support, inadequate long-term financing, and limited acknowledgement limit the full potential of these initiatives (CODE-NGO, 2022). These programs must be kept alive and included in more comprehensive development plans by means of coordinated participation and adequate budget allocation, therefore strengthening their relevance. The verbalizations of the respondent are:

> **CSO03**: *Nag-oorganisa kami ng mga seminar sa barangay tungkol sa kalusugan at kalinisan, kahit walang suporta mula sa LGU.* (We organize seminars in the barangay about health and sanitation, even without support from the LGU.)

> **CSO04**: *We conduct awareness para magkaroon ng kamalayan ang iba tungkol sa kalagayan ng mga batang may mental disorder*. (We conduct awareness campaigns so that others will also understand the condition of children with mental disorders.)

CSO06: *Kapag may feeding program, clean-up drive, o bloodletting, sariling pondo namin ang gamit*. (When there's a feeding program, clean-up drive, or bloodletting, we use our own funds.)

CSO07: We help build a supportive community, advocate to end violence against women and girls, and implement service and advocacy projects.

CSO08: *Sa needs assessment na ginagawa, nalalaman ko ang mga problema at pangangailangan ng aming organization.* (Through our needs assessment, I learn the problems and needs of our organization).

CSO12: *Sa aming organisasyon, nagkakaroon kami ng iba't ibang activities, ma'am, tulad po noong March may program kami para sa kababaihan.* (In our organization, we conduct various activities, ma'am. For example, in March, we had a program for women.)

CSO15: *Kapag kailangan ng aming consumers ng bigas o groceries, nagde-deliver po kami.* (When our consumers need rice or groceries, we deliver them.).

B. Sectoral Policy Proposal

Many CSOs in Tuguegarao City pointed out particular issues they wanted to bring to the local council for possible policy development, outside of their involvement in consultations and projects. These comprise updated transportation rules, improved medical and welfare support for PWDs and children, protections of livelihoods for vendors, and support systems for aging cooperative members. Many organizations said they sent letters or offered recommendations during meetings, particularly in cases when ordinances directly impact their daily operations. For example, transportation sector CSOs called for changes depending on their present needs and offered insights on obsolete terminal policies.

While vendor groups expressed interest in ordinances that would formally acknowledge their presence in controlled public areas like night markets, cooperative members sought better rules on intergenerational leadership transitions. The DILG (2021) claims that inclusive governance depends much on CSO involvement in legislative and planning activities, particularly in cases when companies support agenda items anchored in local reality. Verbalizations of the respondent are:

CSO02: *Kung may kailangang baguhin o iayos, sinasabi namin sa kanila para makatulong. Gaya na lang sa approval para sa terminal, hanggang*

ngayon, wala pa pong natutupad sa request naming. (If something needs to be changed or improved, we let them know so we can help. For example, our request for terminal approval, until now, it still hasn't been granted).

CSO06: *May mga batas at adbokasiya din na nais ko sanang mangyari, pero hindi ako tinutulungan ng LGU.* (There are laws and advocacies I would like to see implemented, but the LGU does not help me).

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CSOs IN POLICY FORMULATION

While CSOs may not always play a formal role in policymaking, their involvement is still important as a component in influencing local governance and addressing community concerns. This section looks into the many ways CSOs contribute to policy formulation. It discusses their participation in LGU meetings and consultations, where they offer input and feedback; their collaboration with LGUs through continued program support and public advocacy; and their independent efforts to carry out and implement initiatives that address specific sectoral concerns. The section also provides their role in policy implementation and their role in advancing advocacy for sectoral interests during public forums. Taken together, these efforts show how CSOs work alongside the government as partners in governance, even when their roles are primarily consultative or supportive.

A. Participation in LGU Meetings and Consultations

The findings reveal that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) participate in LGU activities and consultations such as meetings, assemblies, budget hearings, open forums, and public consultations initiated by the LGU. The respondents are invited to attend such meetings, and they ensure they have representatives present at each meeting. During public consultations and hearings, they also approve the local government's proposed policies or ordinances. Moreover, they also give their feedback if they were asked. According to Pasamonte (2024), CSOs are invited to meetings and conferences and can share their thoughts and opinions on a specific agenda. Moreover, Mavee (2022) states that CSOs assist in bringing communities' and citizens' demands to the attention of policymakers.

The local government recognizes the roles that CSOs have in local governance, as evidenced by the findings. Nevertheless, despite their participation in meetings and consultations, CSO involvement is frequently limited to providing feedback or approving decisions only when prompted. Nevertheless, the respondents share that despite this, there is no assurance that their approvals and disapprovals will affect the proposed policy discussed with

them. Although CSOs' involvement in formulating policies and ordinances is limited, their contribution to development planning is highly relevant and practical (Cahimtong & Tenorio, 2024). Verbalizations of the respondents are as follows:

> **CSO01:** *Iniimbitahan lang nila kami kapag may meeting.* (They only invite us when there is a meeting.)
>
> **CSO10**: We are not deeply involved. Most of the time, they call us for meetings, and then we attend, and when we have ideas, we share them.
>
> **CSO15**: *Tuwing may public consultation, nandoon kami, nakikinig at nagbibigay ng mga suggestions, lalo na kung may kinalaman sa livelihood programs, financial assistance, at support para sa mga cooperatives.* (Whenever there is a public consultation, we are there, listening and giving suggestions, especially if it concerns livelihood programs, financial assistance, and support for cooperatives.)
>
> **CSO12**: *Mostly, 'yung mga meetings na naimbitahan kami ay tungkol sa budget o programa ng LGU.* (Mostly, the meetings we are invited to are about the budget or LGU programs.)

B. Voicing Sectoral Needs and Concerns

In a functioning participatory governance system, it is important for CSOs to have the opportunity to voice the needs and concerns of their respective sectors. This helps the LGU of Tuguegarao City identify areas where they extend support by formulating policies that are beneficial to different CSOs and by understanding the concerns that need to be addressed.

The findings indicate that the majority of CSOs take part in meetings and consultations where they have the opportunity to express the specific needs of their sectors. They are frequently invited to join public forums or hearings, providing them with a platform to raise issues and voice their concerns. However, they also said that their participation does not usually lead to concrete actions. Their feedback is heard but rarely results in policies or programs that solve their problems. Some organizations feel that the LGU listens more to other "priority sectors". Others expressed frustration because they are asked to join meetings but are not supported in creating real solutions.

Based on the responses of the CSOs, it is evident that they are doing their best to raise collective concerns and share their opinions with policymakers. In doing so, they help provide insight into the issues that truly need attention and

prioritization. In doing so, CSOs improve their responsiveness and ownership, which is a crucial element of CSO Development Effectiveness, Transparency and Accountability (Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, 2019). CSOs should be allowed to share their perspectives and participate in decision-making processes. Involving the individuals affected by a CSO's advocacy in shaping both its internal directions and external initiatives, the organization remains responsive and is more likely to align its efforts with the real needs of its community (Steffek et al., 2010). Moreover, CSOs help create a more just society by ensuring that marginalized voices are included in the development of public policy (Hussein, 2024). Verbalizations of the respondents are as follows:

> **CSO01**: *May mga open forum kung saan naisha-share namin 'yung aming mga challenges or issues.* (There are open forums where we can share our challenges or issues.)
>
> **CSO04**: We only voiced out our issues and concerns during meetings or when we talk to someone in the position.
>
> **CSO06**: *Naranasan na naming magsabi ng mga problema at isyu ng aming organisasyon.* (We have experienced voicing out the problems and issues of our organization.)
>
> **CSO08**: *Nalalaman ko ang mga problema... at ibinibigay namin ito sa mga policymakers.* (I learn about the problems and give them to the policymakers.)
>
> **CSO14**: *Ang mga na-gather na pangangailangan... ay dinadala at inilalapit sa city policymakers.* (The gathered needs are brought to the city policymakers.)

CHALLENGES IN ENGAGING WITH THE LGU

Many CSOs still continue to encounter challenges when engaging with local government, particularly in areas of policy formulation, even as their local governance continues to grow. These constraints hinder their transition from symbolic engagement to meaningful collaboration. This section examines the barriers that limit participation. This includes minimal involvement in the actual policy-making process, where their contribution is often limited to consultations without corresponding decision-making authority; communication and

relationship issues with officials of local government units, such as limited access and perceived favoritism towards particular sectors; and capacity and resource limitations, which hinder their ability to sustain operations and influence policy. By bringing out the need for more inclusive, transparent, and supportive frameworks that enable their full participation in local governance, these subthemes collectively shed light on the institutional and structural shortcomings that CSOs must overcome.

A. Limited Involvement in Policy Formulation

CSOs have limited involvement in the policy formulation process. Many feel they are only consulted and not truly included in drafting policies and ordinances. Some of them believe there is no guarantee that their feedback and suggestions will be incorporated into the formulation of policies. However, some believe their suggestions are used to review ordinances and policies. Moreover, some say they only cooperate with the local government to sustain their organization. Some believe it is not their role to formulate policies because they are not part of the legislative council. However, Article 62, Rule XIII of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Local Government Code (R.A. 1160) requires local government units to promote the establishment and operation of nongovernmental organizations, peoples' organizations, and the private sector to make them active partners in the pursuit of local autonomy and to directly involve them in the planning and implementation of programs and projects in the LGUs.

The limited involvement of CSOs in policy formulation indicates a potential gap in participatory governance where the voices of the sectors that they represent are not fully integrated into policies that affect their lives. Without their participation, there is a risk of overlooking the unique needs of the grassroots communities. This might only lead to less responsive, less inclusive, and less effective policies. Also, according to Islam and Ehsan (2019), the relationship between effective governance and civil society participation is so fundamental that scholars assert that institutionalizing good governance is impossible without an active civil society. Thus, it is essential that civil society be empowered, and CSOs play a more prominent role in democratic governance, decision-making, and monitoring (The Role of Civil Society in Policymaking, n.d.). Verbalizations of the respondents are as follows:

> **CSO01**: *Wala pa kaming mga batas na naibibigay at naipapasa sa LGU.* (We have not yet provided or passed any laws to the LGU.)

> **CSO02**: *Pero kahit may effort na makipag-usap, hindi pa rin kami involved sa policymaking mismo [at] hindi kasama sa pagdesisyon.* (Even though there’s an effort to talk, we are still not involved in the actual policymaking itself and we are not part of the decision-making.)

CSO03: *Pero as of now, hindi pa po kami active sa mismong paggawa ng mga batas o ordinansa. Kung tutuusin po, nandun kami sa part ng pagdinig, nagbibigay ng feedback kapag tinatanong pero wala pa kami sa level ng policy [formulation].* (As of now, we are not yet active in the actual creation of laws or ordinances. If you think about it, we are only part of the hearings, providing feedback when asked, but we are not yet at the level of policy formulation.)

CSO09: So far, there's no specific policy that our organization has directly contributed to.

CSO12: *Parang feedback lang po talaga hindi kami kasama sa mismong pagbuo ng ordinansa o mga batas dito sa Tuguegarao.* (It's really just feedback—we are not part of the actual drafting of ordinances or laws here in Tuguegarao.)

CSO14: Isa pa, hindi isinasali ang aming organization sa mismong paggawa ng batas — hanggang consultation phase lang kami, at pagkatapos noon, LGU na lang ang gumagawa ng batas. Dahil dito, hindi tuloy naririnig o nasasama ang tunay na boses ng sektor sa final output ng mga ordinansa. (Also, our organization is not included in the actual drafting of laws—we are only part of the consultation phase, and after that, it's just the LGU that crafts the laws. Because of this, the real voice of the sector is not heard or reflected in the final output of the ordinances.)

B. Communication and Relationship Issues with LGU

Many CSOs find it difficult to build good relationships and communicate well with local government officials. Even though CSOs are supposed to be included in local governance, they often face problems such as being ignored, not receiving updates, or having trouble reaching the right people in the LGU. These communication issues significantly make it hard for them to actively contribute to planning and decision-making processes. When CSOs and LGUs do not work together smoothly, it affects how well they can serve the community. This theme delves into the problems CSOs experience when trying to establish constructive dialogue, build partnerships, or secure support from the LGU.

B.1. Difficulty in Communicating and Accessing LGU Officials

This reflects the challenge CSOs face in reaching local officials or receiving meaningful responses. Though participation is structurally provided for, actual access to key decision-makers is often delayed, filtered through intermediaries, or made impractical by scheduling and bureaucratic constraints. Reyes and Tayao (2020) stress that sustaining public participation requires direct and reliable

communication channels between LGUs and CSOs. Without opportunities for two-way dialogue or timely access to officials, their contributions risk becoming marginal rather than meaningful to local governance processes. Verbalizations of the respondents are as follows:

> **CSO04**: *Schedule for meeting is hard with the LGU… the time they will give you is limited. Moreover, the representative will face you instead of the person you're looking for or want to talk to.* (Scheduling a meeting with the LGU is difficult… the time they give you is limited. Moreover, you're met by a representative instead of the person you're looking for or want to talk to.)

> **CSO09**: *Minsan talaga nagkakaroon ng conflict ang schedule ko kapag nagpapatawag ng meeting ang LGU, kaya hindi kami palaging nakakapag-participate.* (Sometimes my schedule conflicts with the LGU's meeting calls, so we're not always able to participate.)
>
> **CSO10**: *Kapag may mga activities kami kailangan namin ng approval from the SDO of Tuguegarao City, minsan nahihirapan kami.* (When we have activities, we need approval from the SDO of Tuguegarao City, and sometimes it's difficult for us.)

B.2. Perceived Prioritization of Other Sectors

Some CSOs voiced concerns that LGUs tend to selectively prioritize certain groups, often those with political ties or greater institutional resources, over smaller or grassroots-based organizations. This perceived favoritism counters the principles and goals of inclusive governance and discourages motivation among less advantaged groups to participate. Yasay (2018) notes that the extent of CSO participation largely depends on the attitudes and openness of LGU leadership. When LGUs engage only with organizations deemed "strategic," the participatory processes become skewed and diminish equitable representation in policymaking. Verbalizations of the respondents are as follows:

> **CSO06**: *Walang masyadong resolution para sa amin kasi kami ay option lamang at mas pinagtutuunan ng pansin ang mga senior citizens, PWD, single parents at iba pang organisasyon. Binubuhay ko na lang 'yung organisasyon ko para lang may power kami.* ((There are not many resolutions for us because we're just an option, and more attention is given to other sectors. I just keep our organization alive so we can have some form of power.))

> **CSO09**: *May assistance ang LGU sa ibang cooperatives, pero hindi kami nakikinabang or hindi kami included sa mga natutulungan.* (The LGU

provides assistance to other cooperatives, but we do not benefit from it or are not included among those being supported.)

C. Limited Financial Support from the LGU

Many CSOs rely on LGUs not only for legal and institutional support but also for financial assistance that helps sustain their operations and achieve their goals. Although these organizations are privately run, they still require support because they operate as non-profit organizations. Most of the time, they depend on their limited resources or seek partnerships elsewhere just to keep their organizations running. Some CSOs, particularly those considered as priority sectors, can receive funding from the LGU. However, for many others, the support is either minimal or difficult to access. This creates financial strain and limits what these organizations can accomplish, especially when it comes to supporting their members or expanding their programs.

From the responses, it is clear that some of the respondents feel they are not getting the financial help they need from the LGU. They carry on with their work using their initiative and limited resources, even in the absence of government support. Others shared that their financial requests are not always approved by the LGU, often because of budget constraints. In certain instances, they had to turn to banks or other external partners for loans just to meet their operational needs. Even when assistance is provided by the LGU, they feel it falls short of covering their real expenses. These experiences reflect how the financial help from the LGU is often limited and unable to sustain or support the work they are doing.

Financial sustainability continues to be a major challenge for CSOs globally. With this, these organizations' ability to plan long-term and be flexible when designing and implementing activities is inhibited (Peace Direct & LINC LLC, 2020). This limited financial support affects not only the organizations' operations but also their ability to plan for the future. Decreases in funding may force CSOs to scale back activities, seek other funding, or rely on their governments for funding (McDonough & Rodríguez, 2020). Since they cannot rely on steady support, they are forced to focus only on short-term goals. This limits their ability to expand their services or improve their programs. As a result, their impact on the community becomes constrained, even if their goals are aligned with public service and development goals.

Insufficient financial support also diminishes the confidence of CSOs, hindering their willingness to take part. Without resources, they cannot fully prepare, attend, or follow through on meetings and proposals. This makes them feel left out or unimportant in government decisions, even though they represent key sectors of society. They become passive observers rather than active partners in community development (Forrester & Sunar, 2011). This weakens the

collaboration between the LGU and the people it serves. Verbalizations of the respondents are as follows:

CSO04: The LGU can't do anything for our financial needs. What the LGU provides for us is not enough.

CSO06: *Binubuhay ko na lang 'yung organisasyon ko para lang may power kami, kami-kami na lang., gamit ang sariling funds* (I just try to keep our organization alive so we can still have some power; it's just us doing it on our own and using our own funds.)

CSO07: As a non-government organization, we rely on funding from partner organizations and agencies to support our projects.

CSO15: *Sa budget naman ng coop, humingi kami ng additional loan kaya nakipag-tie-up kami sa Landbank. Ayon, napagbigyan naman.* (Regarding the coop's budget, we asked for an additional loan, so we partnered with Landbank. Thankfully, we were granted.)

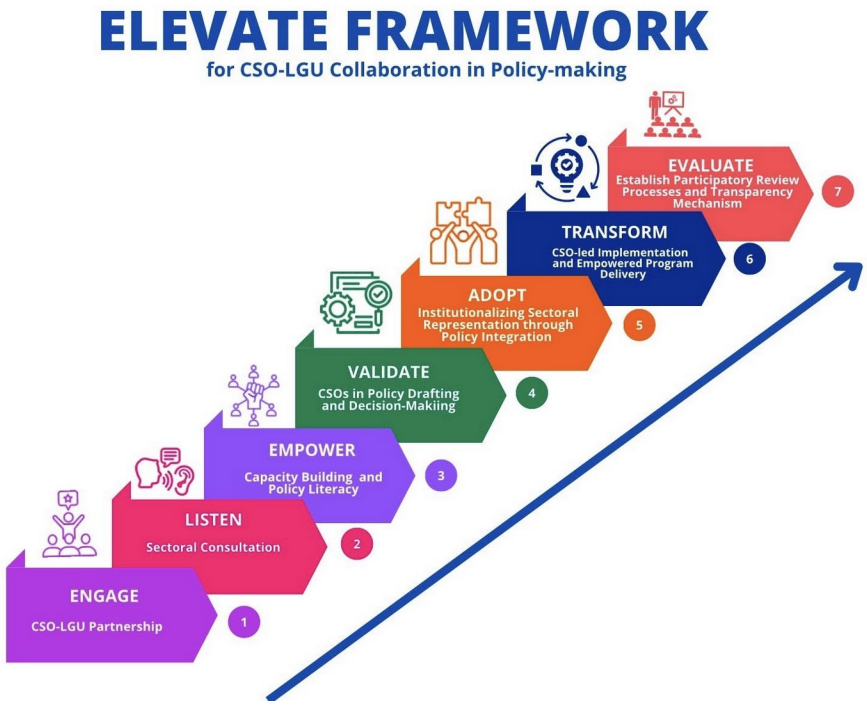

Figure 1. *Framework for Effective CSO-LGU Collaboration in Policy Formulation in the Perspective of LGU*

The findings of the study revealed significant challenges for CSO-LGU engagement, particularly in policy formulation. The researchers identified three critical areas to resolve: limited engagement, ineffective communication, and symbolic participation. To address this, the researchers propose the ELEVATE Framework, a step-by-step model created to increase CSO participation and promote responsive, inclusive, and influential policymaking in Tuguegarao City. The seven main actions that the framework outlines include: Engage, Listen, Empower, Validate, Adopt, Transform, and Evaluate. Every level builds on the one before it, guaranteeing that CSOs and LGUs are totally involved as creators of policies based on the realities of the society.

(1) **Engage**, (CSO-LGU Partnerships). Formal and institutionalized partnerships allow CSOs to be co-creators of policies. The data shows CSOs are only engaged in consultations and approvals of policies. Creating a CSO Policy Advisory Council with regular seats for CSOs allows them to share and exchange ideas critical to government actions and decisions. According to Yasay (2018), civil society participation in Bottom-up Budgeting projects in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, has

strengthened commitment towards poverty alleviation, productive partnerships, and the establishment of the City CSO Affairs Office.

(2) **Listen**, (Sectoral Consultations). Institutionalized sectoral policy dialogues where CSOS manage meetings and lead agendas based on community needs. Although CSOs raise issues in meetings or assemblies, many feel these are disregarded. Policies more pertinent and efficient to the needs of the people result from monthly sector dialogues attended by LGU officials responding to CSO recommendations. The study of Palihovici (2022) shows that in institutions/communities where dialogue between the public administration and civil society organizations is valued at its fair value, the community benefits from effective governance, focused on citizens' issues, and the degree of interest and involvement of citizens in community affairs is higher compared to those communities where this dialogue is missing.

(3) **Empower**, (Capacity-Building and Policy Literacy). Provide CSOs with training on policy creation, oversight, and assessment. CSOs stated that they did not feel qualified or entitled to directly influence ordinances. The Department of the Interior and Local Government's (DILG) annual CSO Policy Training can help them strengthen their critical engagement and core policy competencies while enabling them to have a greater say in the creation of policies that could impact grassroots communities. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs is essential to enhancing their role in governance and policy processes (Manju et al., 2024).

(4) **Validate**, (CSOs in Policy Drafting and Decision-Making). Involve CSOs in technical working groups for ordinance creation, not just during consultations. Many CSOs feel that their contributions are merely symbolic or limited to feedback, with little to no real impact. It is time for the LGU to genuinely allow CSOs to take part and have a seat in the actual policymaking process. Instead of simply inviting them to public hearings, the LGU should give them a clear and regular role in the legislative process. Ensure charter-mandated CSO representation in ordinance committees, including the granting of voting rights. This will help make policies more open, fair, and reflective of the real needs of the people. Gerard (2015) states that ASEAN's engagement of CSOs and the broader trend of participatory policymaking should be considered as

creating sites for contestation, rather than being implicitly democratizing.

(5) **Adopt**, (Institutionalizing Sectoral Representations through Policy Integration). This stage brings out full integration of CSO policy priorities into official LGU actions. This phase reflects how CSOs have begun actively participating in policy adoption and application. Through mechanisms like quota-based representation in Local Special Bodies (LSBs), ordinance committees, and councils, LGUs operationalize equitable participation from all sectors: youth, women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), farmers, senior citizens, and others. This evolution is supported by studies such as that of Medina-Guce and Galindes (2017), noting that while the Local Government Code prescribes a 25% CSO representation in Local Development Councils (LDCs), the roles and capacities necessary for meaningful participation remain are still lacking. They advocate for a broader citizen representation, and clearer CSO functions within LDCs are essential for deepening citizen participation in local governance. Participation from all sectors: youth, women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), farmers, senior citizens, and others. This evolution is supported by studies such as that of Medina-Guce and Galindes (2017), noting that while the Local Government Code prescribes a 25% CSO representation in Local Development Councils (LDCs), the roles and capacities necessary for meaningful participation remain are still lacking. They advocate for a broader citizen representation, and clearer CSO functions within LDCs are essential for deepening citizen participation in local governance.

(6) **Transform**, (CSO-Led Implementation and Empowered Program Delivery). CSOs have progressed beyond consultative roles to actively managing and implementing community programs with policy relevance. Through collaboration with LGU, they now carry out bottom-up initiatives from simple participation to a sense of ownership of local governance processes. This transformation reflects a structural change where CSOs lead not only in involved in shaping policies but also in producing concrete and tangible outcomes, reflecting matured civic leadership, established partnerships, and empowered citizen engagement. Cahimtong and Tenorio (2024) observed that in a southern Philippine district, CSOs were instrumental in both local development planning and program implementation. Their involvement ensured that decisions were made through consensus and represented a wide range of community sectors, showing the importance of CSO leadership in achieving inclusive governance. According to Pasamonte (2024), the need for strengthening systems that amplify grassroots voices is noted, noting that while CSO engagement in planning was high, their involvement in implementation and monitoring required enhancement.

This points to the ongoing transformation of CSOs from planners to implementers in local governance structures.

(7) **Evaluate**, Establish Participatory Review Processes and Transparency Mechanisms. LGUs should be obliged to keep track of how CSO suggestions are included in policymaking. CSOs barely understand how their efforts affect actual laws at the moment, which results in disengagement and a lack of drive sometimes. LGUs should design a publicly available dashboard tracking ordinances and displaying who CSOs helped to develop each policy. Both CSOs and LGUs have to remain updated about the public policies allowing their involvement in governance (People in Need Philippines, 2024). This openness will inspire responsibility, help with continuous CSO involvement, and foster confidence between the government and civil society.

The ELEVATE Framework, which consists of seven steps for achieving effective collaboration between CSOs and LGUs, would be a valuable tool in strengthening and enhancing the contributions of CSOs in policymaking. It also aligns with the legal mandate enshrined in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which states in Article XIII, Section 16: “The right of the people and their organizations to effective and reasonable participation at all levels of social, political, and economic decision-making shall not be abridged. The State shall, by law, facilitate the establishment of adequate consultation mechanisms.” Furthermore, Section 34 of the Local Government Code of 1991 (Book I, Chapter 4) provides that LGUs shall promote the establishment and operation of people’s and non-governmental organizations as active partners in the pursuit of local autonomy. Through this framework, CSOs will not only be consulted but will also have more chances to take part in different stages of policymaking, from identifying issues to checking if the policy works well. This helps make sure that their opinions are heard, their efforts are valued, and their role in local governance becomes more active and regular.

CONCLUSION

The level of engagement of CSOs in the policy formulation processes in Tuguegarao City remains low, as reflected in the data gathered. Most CSOs mainly engage at the low engagement levels, which are Observing and Following, and at the moderate level, which is Endorsing. Based on the findings, CSOs' engagement at the highest levels of Owning and Leading is almost non-existent. This indicates that CSOs are aware of the local ordinances and show support for such ordinances through signing petitions and public statements. However, their engagement is often limited to consultations and approvals of policies without necessarily influencing them through drafting and managing policy formulations.

Based on the findings deduced from the respondents, it is evident that while CSOs in Tuguegarao City are invited to participate in meetings, consultations, and LGU-led activities, their actual influence on policy formulation remains limited and largely symbolic. Their involvement is often constrained to providing feedback, approving proposed ordinances, or assisting with implementation when asked, rather than co-creating or shaping policies. Although CSOs contribute significantly through independent community initiatives and by voicing sectoral concerns, they face persistent challenges such as a lack of institutional support, insufficient communication with LGU officials, prioritization of other sectors, and financial constraints. These structural limitations hinder their full participation and weaken their potential as active partners in governance. Different sectors of CSOs actively engage in addressing community needs by representing marginalized groups, contributing to inclusive development, and promoting meaningful participation in policymaking processes. While the LGU acknowledges the roles of CSOs, there is a clear need for deeper and more institutionalized collaboration. Therefore, we proposed the ELEVATE framework, a step-by-step model designed to increase CSO participation, allowing them not only to speak but also to be truly heard and integrated into the policymaking process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) CSOs should first provide internal policy process training to ensure their strategic and informed participation during debates.
2) Organizations must maintain records of their participation, including feedback sent in and meeting minutes. Accurate records boost trustworthiness and facilitate monitoring their impacts across time.
3) CSOs should advocate official roles instead of occasional technical committee consultations and ordinance formulation. A seat at the table guarantees continuous participation in decision-making.
4) LGUs should formally have CSOs on voting memberships in policymaking bodies and ordinance committees. This institutional function guarantees that important decisions pay attention to their opinions.
5) To adopt the ELEVATE framework and inspire other researchers to improve it, which shall form the basis for future studies to further promote inclusive, structured, and empowered CSOs' engagement.
6) LGUs are urged to promote openness by demonstrating which CSO recommendations are included in policies. Public comment systems support the building of confidence between the government and civil society.
7) Future studies should explore CSO involvement in other provinces or cities to ascertain whether Tuguegarao's experience mirrors more general national trends or regional dynamics.

8) Beyond just participation figures, researchers are encouraged to look at how CSO inputs affect final decisions. This approach highlights whether involvement is merely symbolic or actually important.
9) Long-term studies should be conducted to observe whether frameworks like ELEVATE result in sustained improvements in CSO participation. Tracking engagement over time will show if reforms have lasting effects.

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